An

American Café

Produced by PeopleAct

& E.C.U.'s Multicultural Literature Program

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What Does America Mean to Me?

An American Café is an original play and outgrowth of the project, "What Does America Mean To Me?", initiated in May of 1996 by PeopleAct, a community theatre organization, and the ECU Multicultural Literature Program, in collaboration with the Greenville Theater Arts Center. With a grant from the North Carolina Humanities Council, we conducted three "conversation groups" of ethnically diverse Eastern North Carolina residents, who spoke about their experiences being American. Their conversations were recorded, and the dialogue and stories made into the play you will see today.

Each group met for three two-hour sessions. Conversation participants, including high school students, long time residents, and new immigrants to Eastern NC, were asked to share their personal stories, opinions, and visions of America. To start this dialogue we asked participants to respond to literary texts on America, from the poetry of Langston Hughes, Chicana Pat Mora, and Walt Whitman to the narrative of Jewish immigrant writer Anzia Yezierska and a Studs Turkel's interview with former Klansman C. P. Ellis.

The conversations turned up many themes--from the historic legacy of discrimination to the most positive aspects of opportunity and community within the United States. Perhaps most importantly, these gatherings revealed an understanding that the American experience is about learning to listen to one other. *An American Café* brings to life the issues raised by the conversation groups on what we see as our commonalities and differences as Americans, what we can do to better listen to each other, and how to work together to build better communities. In this way, we begin to create a living space for us to talk, laugh, and share our feelings on what it means to be an American today.

"What Does America Mean to Me?" was made possible through the generous support of the following: East Carolina University, the North Carolina Humanities Council, the Perkins Trust, and Z. Smith Reynolds Foundation. This project was co-directed by Deborah Morrison--Project Artistic Director, Janice Periquet--Project Managing Director, and Gay Wilentz--ECU Project Director.

An American Café

by Carl Campbell, Todd Lovett, Deborah Morrison, Janice Periquet, and Gay Wilentz

Cast (in order of appearance)

Jim: Doug Mitchell
Ruth: Lauretta Riggs
Carlos: Ramon Serrano
Lavinia: Sebrina Cooke
Godfrey: Cliff Kilpatrick
Amy: Catherine Black
Rachel: Juliana Miller
Marcus: Dana Reeves
Danny: Joseph Campbell

Production Staff

Director: Deborah Morrison
Assistant Director: Carl Campbell
Technical Director/Lighting: Carl Campbell
Stage Manager: Brian Tenpenny
Multimedia Designer: Todd Lovett
Set Designer: Neil Oliver
Set Construction: Neil Oliver, Jaime Witkus, Carl Campbell, Deborah Morrison, Brian Tenpenny, Ross Wade
Publicity: Janice Periquet, Gay Wilentz
Poster Design/Program Cover: Todd Lovett
Program, Webmaster: Dave Clark

Place: A Coffeehouse in Eastern North Carolina in the late 20th Century.

The performance will run 90 minutes, without intermission.

Director's Notes

An American Café is a play about the power of listening, and the bridges that can be built by sharing a story, an idea, or a smile. It has been my privilege to help facilitate just that, working with a talented and committed Artistic Staff and Cast in a project that is truly an ongoing conversation about "what America means" to us all. Tonight you will join in this dialogue.

In January of this year, Carl Campbell, Todd Lovett, Janice Periquet, Gay Wilentz and I began sorting through the 27 hours of material gathered over the summer of 1996. The diversity of the members of our scripting group was reflected in the different perspectives we each brought to the writing of the play. Sometimes we argued, sometimes we agreed, and we all had to learn to balance listening with having our say.

Nine people joined our scripting process in August of this year, as actors and creative collaborators. They have spent eight weeks of rehearsal improvising with each other, testing the script, and adding their own perspectives to the dialogue. Working together as a true ensemble, they have become like a family, and they are an inspiration to those of us working with them.

Tonight you will see the product of our efforts, and be invited to join in the dialogue. At the end of the play, the characters will leave the coffeehouse to go out on the street and talk to you about what America means to *you*. Join us, as this conversation comes full circle.

--Deborah Morrison, Project Artistic Director

Meet the Players

Catherine L. Black (AMY) is currently a sophomore at ECU, working towards a Nursing degree. She is from Wake Forest, where she was in many high school productions. She is also a member of the International Thespian Society. She would like everyone to know that it is an honor for her to be in this play. In reality, Catherine cannot stand the thought of milk, let alone dairy products, with the exception of ice cream.

Sebrina Cooke (LAVINIA) is a senior at East Carolina University. She aspires to become a nurse in a Mental Health setting. Sebrina has worked with ECU Thespians of Diversity for 3 years. Sebrina has been in numerous high school and community productions, and studied dance for 9 years.

Joseph Campbell (DANNY) Joseph is of Scotch-Cherokee heritage and a Greenville native. In 1996 he completed his M.A. in Literature at ECU. He currently works as Managing Editor of a national medical journal. Past roles include The Ultra-Vixen with Washington, DC performance artist Esmirelda, and Father in *Flowers for Algernon.*

Clifford Kilpatrick (GODFREY) Cliff is a native of Newark, New Jersey now residing in Greenville. He made his acting debut in 1980 and has been seen on stages across America, most recently in the touring production *Child Support.* He is both honored and proud to be playing the part of Godfrey, and he truly believes we should all take the time to listen to each other.

Juliana Miller (RACHEL) As the youngest member of our production, Juliana is making her theatre debut. She is a sophomore at D.H. Conley High School, and is involved in the theatre program there. Future plans include pursuing her love of photography, volunteering for the Pitt County AIDS Center, and some day becoming a marine biologist. "No other road; no other way; no day but today."

Doug Mitchell (JIM) has acted in numerous regional theatres including the ECU Summer Theatre, *The Lost Colony*, Carolina Beach Theatre, and the Mint Museum in Charlotte. He is known in this area for his work as director for the Ayden Theatre Workshop, as well as his fourteen year stint with Dance Arts Theatre's *Nutcracker Ballet.* Additionally, he has played the role of Andy in *Love Letters* in "too many dinner theatres." For the past five summers Doug has taught in the Drama Department of the North Carolina School of the Arts in Winston-Salem.

Dana Reeves (MARCUS) is a native New Yorker, currently finishing an undergraduate degree in Geography and Electronic News Communication at ECU. He enjoys playing sports, traveling, and whatever else he feels like. Applying the 4 D's, desire, determination, discipline and dedication, Dana believes he can accomplish anything. He pays homage to his African and African-American ancestors. They are his inspiration and role models.

Lauretta V. Riggs (RUTH) Lauretta has appeared in Community theatre in this area for 20 years. Her most recent theatrical appearances were as Aunt Ida in an off-Broadway production of *How I Spent My Life's Vacation* and Lucille in *The Cemetry Club*, performed at the New Bern Civic Theatre. Lauretta has had her own monogram business for 30 years and also buys and sells antiques.

Ramón Serrano (CARLOS) An East Carolina University graduate student, Ramón is a Wilson native, originally from Mexico. He is currently working for Pitt County Schools as a Spanish Teacher, and pursuing his Masters Degree in Teaching English as a Second Language.

Meet the Artistic Staff

Carl Campbell (Assistant Director, Writer) A New York native, Carl has been in Greenville for 7 years working as Artistic Director of the Greenville Theatre Arts Center. Carl attended NYU's Tisch School of the Performing Arts, and has worked professionally as a dancer and choreographer for over fifteen years. He has been seen on stages across America as Bruce in Payton Promotions' *A Good Man Is Hard to Find*. Carl is currently working with the hit gospel musical *Child Support* as Stage/Production Manager.

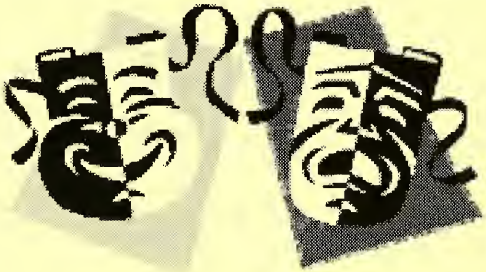
Todd Lovett (Multimedia Designer, Writer) A native of North Carolina, Todd holds a Master's degree in Creative Writing and is currently a Lecturer in English at East Carolina University. In addition to his professional standing, he is a self-trained musician and visual artist. Over the past six years, he has worked towards integrating fiction and non-fiction story-telling with visual and auditory art, and he has produced a number of multimedia performance works using text, video, and music.

continued next page

Deborah Morrison (Director, Writer, Project Artistic Director) A Greenville, NC native, Deborah is founder and Artistic Director of PeopleAct. She holds a Master of Arts in Communication with a concentration in Performance Studies from UNC-Chapel Hill. Deborah has designed and taught numerous improvisation-based performance workshops, utilizing performance as a tool for social change. Before returning to her home town of Greenville in 1994, Deborah spent a year working as a director and actor for the Black Box Theatre Company in Prague, Czech Republic. She currently teaches in the Communications Dept. at ECU.

Janice Periquet (Writer, Project Managing Director) After a year of serving as Managing Director for PeopleAct, Janice now serves as PeopleAct's Secretary/Treasurer. She graduated from the University of California at Santa Barbara with a Bachelor of Arts in English Literature with a Creative Writing emphasis. She met her partner Deborah Morrison at Legacy International, where she coordinated the U.N. sponsored international youth summer program. She is currently a Public Fellow with the Institute for the Arts and Humanities at UNC-Chapel Hill.

Gay Wilentz (Writer, ECU Project Director) Gay Wilentz is Associate Professor of English and Co-Coordinator of ECU's Multicultural Literature Program. Originally from New York, Gay began her career as a singer and performer, before becoming an activist and academic. She was a Fulbright scholar to Nigeria and received her doctorate at University of Texas in 1986. Her teaching and research interests include literature of the African and Jewish diasporas, ethnic studies, and women's studies. She is committed to the idea of using literature as a means for social change, and sees this play as one way to work toward a multicultural America that is socially just and where people respect and listen to each other.



CONVERSATION PARTICIPANTS

GROUP 1

Anthony Agnestu, Javier Castillo, Brian Cotton, Eric Humphrey, Paula Jenkins, David Knox, Mary Kohn, Pauline Robery, Kirstin Schreiber

GROUP 2

Paula Blumenfeld, Nick Cauley, Greg Davenport, Karen Dobbins, Dan Earnhart, Jeffrey Gay
Cary Kraig, Douglas Hobbs, Linda Pololi, Shomali Sengupta

GROUP 3

Diane Baron, Rena Campbell, Sue Dell, Justin Finck, Wesley Jones, Sue Luddeke, Clejetter Pickett, Alan Schreier, Hans Wiese, Wilhemina Wiese

ADDITIONAL INTERVIEWS

Bill Atkins, Matthew Chavis

CONVERSATION LEADERS

Alicia Alexander, Mike Hamer, Juvencio Rocha Peralta, Janice Periquet, John Sabella, Gay Wilentz

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Visit the PeopleArt Homepage

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webmaster Dave Clark, greenville-npo@geocities.com

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THANK YOU!

Maria Angélica y George Taylor • Aramark Dining Services • Alice Barkley, North Carolina Humanities Council • Harriet Barnes, Wilson Arts Council • Joan and Harry Black • Leigh Ann and Dick Briley, East Coast Coffee Distributors • James B. Chavis, Vice-Chancellor for Student Affairs, UNC-Pembroke • Annette and Rena Campbell • Matthew Chavis • Linda, Dave, and Miranda Clark • Taffye Clayton, Ledonia S. Wright African-American Cultural Center • Carlecellar, Elliot and Willie Cooke, Craven County Arts Council • Leonard Darby, ECU Scene Shop • Tina Dixon • Richard Eakin, Chancellor, East Carolina University • John Early • Robert Edward, Director of Grants Administration, East Carolina University • Tom Feldbush, Vice-Chancellor for Academic Affairs, East Carolina University • Harlan Gradin, North Carolina Humanities Council • Greenville Theatre Arts Center • Mike Hamer • Olga Harris • Leda Hartman, UNC-Chapel Hill • Mayor Nancy M. Jenkins • Emily Kane, Office of Sponsored Programs, East Carolina University • Alice Keene, Pitt County Community Schools • Herman Kight, Wilson Technical Community College • Elbert Kilpatrick • Joe Kilpatrick, Z. Smith Reynolds Foundation • Tom Lambeth, Z. Smith Reynolds Foundation • Torey Lancaster • Julie Long, Herb's Restaurant Equipment • Alexus Mariah • Andy McLawhorn, Ayden Arts & Recreation Center • Mendenhall Cafe • David Miller • Susan Moffatt-Thomas, Swiss Bear • Shirley Morrison, Re/Max Preferred Realty • Bob Morrison • Debbie and Dennis O'Neal • Faith Nobles • David Payton • PeopleAct Board of Directors • Layne Phelps • Clejetter Pickett, *The Daily Reflector* • Pitt-Greenville Arts Council • Loren Raynor • Alan Schreier, Office of Sponsored Programs, East Carolina University • Tish Scott, Wilson Technical Community College • La familia Serrano • Shawn Smith, Elizabeth City State University • Keats Sparrow, Dean, College of Arts & Sciences, East Carolina University • Jim Sullivan, Perkins Trust • Shemika, Jacquetta and Tierra Taylor • Sandy Tuten, New Bern Civic Theatre • Charlie Vincent, Greenville Recreation & Parks

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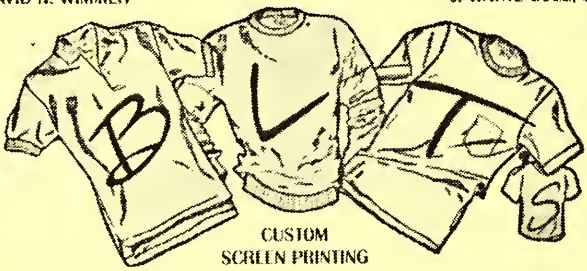

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EVALUATION

	Strongly disagree				Strongly agree
1. This play has made me think more about what it means to be an American today.	1	2	3	4	5
2. Watching this play has led me to think about the interaction of people of different ethnicities and backgrounds.	1	2	3	4	5
3. After seeing this play, I will more likely be open to dialogue on improving our communities.	1	2	3	4	5

Additional comments/ideas on ways to improve our communities:

_____

_____

_____

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